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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [EG](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#) [SA](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: RUBAIE ON CURRENT SECURITY AND POLITICAL SITUATION

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RYAN C. CROCKER, REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

11. (S) SUMMARY: During a March 28 call on National Security Advisor Mowafuq Rubaie, the Ambassador discussed the current security situation in Baghdad, Basrah, and the southern provinces, all of which were the scenes of intensified conflict with criminal elements associated with Moqtada al-Sadr (MAS). While there were serious challenges in all of these areas, including the desertion of some ISF members, Rubaie assessed that the security situation was "holding up." They discussed security and political courses of action, including the need to shore up support for the Maliki government domestically and in the region in order to avoid a no-confidence vote in the Council of Representatives (COR), a vote which the Sadrists appeared to be pursuing. Rubaie revealed that his conversations with Sayyed Mustafa al-Yacoubi, a confidante of Moqtada al-Sadr, had not yielded any results. The Ambassador urged the GOI to engage Iran in order to end its malign influence which was now endangering the Maliki government. Syria and the SOFA talks were briefly discussed. Please see paragraph 16 for post's request that the Department issue instructions to Embassy Cairo, Embassy Amman, and Embassy Riyadh. END SUMMARY.

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SECURITY SITUATION CHALLENGING  
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12. (S) Rubaie reported that he led a meeting regarding the current situation in Baghdad with ISF and CF leaders earlier in the day and that the Prime Minister had joined via teleconference from Basrah. Rubaie felt that the leaders were &fired up8 after the meeting and that they had a good plan for Baghdad. A Crisis Action Cell (CAC) meeting tonight would be chaired by DPM Barham Salih and include the deputy ministers from all security ministries, since the ministers remained in Basrah with the PM. The CAC would focus on the security situation in provinces outside of Baghdad.

13. (S) Rubaie, who had returned from a trip to Saudi Arabia the evening before, assessed that in general the security situation was &holding up8, but the government was facing serious challenges. Desertion, mainly of Iraqi local police (IP), as well as some National Police (NP) and Iraqi Army (IA) forces in both Basrah and Baghdad was a problem. To compensate, the government was accelerating recruitment, which the Ambassador acknowledged would provide an especially good image of citizens backing up their government at a time of crisis. While ammunition and weapons were not a problem for the ISF, some of these had been lost to JAM when some 230 police in Shulla and Muthaq had surrendered and given up

several vehicles and all of their weapons to JAM. The Ambassador noted that an IA unit in Kadhamiyah had been overrun and that JAM had taken its Humvees. During fierce fighting in Mahmudiyah, Rubaie asserted that 80 enemy had been killed for the loss of four ISF.

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SOUTHERN PROVINCES IN BAD SHAPE  
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¶4. (S) The situation in Kut was "not very good" according to Rubaie's information, with unofficial reports indicating that the ISF controlled only the main thoroughfare. Al-Amarah was completely overrun by JAM, and the PM was incensed that the Governor had declared he would no longer take orders from the central government. Vice President Adil Abd al-Mahdi had called Rubaie from Damascus (where he is leading the GOI delegation to the Arab League Summit) to relate what he had heard about the deteriorating situation in Nasiriyah.

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PLAN FOR BAGHDAD: BUFFER FOR IZ  
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¶5. (S) Rubaie was confident that Multinational Division-Baghdad Commander MG Hammond and Baghdad ISF Commander General Abbud had a good plan to address security. The goal was to push those launching rockets at least 1.5 kilometers back from their current positions so that they would be out of rocket range from the International Zone. NOTE: At least some rockets available to criminal elements can reach the IZ even from beyond Sadr City. END NOTE. The curfews in Baghdad and Basrah lasting until 0500 on Sunday

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would also thwart attempts to accelerate tension.

¶6. (S) Rubaie expressed concern that in some neighborhoods of Baghdad JAM had been acting as a counterbalance to AQI, and that this positive effect might be disturbed as some JAM members moved to Basrah and others withdrew from mixed neighborhoods to take up defensive positions in Sadr City or otherwise attack ISF. The PM was also concerned that Sons of Iraq volunteers (many of whom are Sunni) might take advantage of tactical JAM withdrawals, and had already received reports that some families (presumably Shia) were being expelled from their homes. The Ambassador suggested that this be discussed at the CAC, but indicated that JAM might actually be expanding its area of operations rather than retracting it at the moment.

¶7. (S) While the PM had mentioned encircling Sadr City and cutting off electricity, water, and food to its residents as punishment for harboring JAM, Rubaie said that he told the PM the GOI needed to be seen as a provider of such necessities in an effort to win over hearts and minds. The Ambassador agreed with Rubaie's concept, indicating that there was a danger of pushing the population towards JAM and that Coalition Forces had been at pains to avoid causing unnecessary civilian casualties even while the IZ came under indirect fire attack.

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NEXT STEPS IN BASRAH  
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¶8. (S) The Ambassador asked Rubaie to lay out the GOI's plan for operations in Basrah. Rubaie began by noting that the PM had announced a weapons buy-back program which had just been extended until April 8. Basrah would be a good story for the upcoming testimony of the Ambassador and General Petraeus, as it was an example of an Iraqi-led nonsectarian operation. The Ambassador agreed while noting that it was important that ISF operations maintained momentum and did not get bogged down. This could be highly dangerous, as ISF supply lines were vulnerable and forces pinned down in an urban

environment could be extremely vulnerable.

¶9. (S) Rubaie confided that it appeared to him that the PM would remain in Basrah until there was a clear perception that he had won a victory. He admitted that he was thinking of "creating" such a victory, but that nothing had yet come to mind. The problem was that some of the targets which the PM had set, such as all weapons in the hands of criminals being given up, were not achievable.

¶10. (S) Rubaie asked whether the Ambassador had seen any indication of Moqtada al-Sadr's orders to JAM, specifically whether it had been ordered to aggressively attack the ISF and CF, or whether it was only to react defensively. The Ambassador replied that it seemed clear in Baghdad, at least, that JAM was on the offensive against both the GOI and the Coalition, with over 80 attacks occurring yesterday alone.

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TALKING TO THE SADRISTS  
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¶11. (S) The Ambassador mentioned the idea, being floated by some Sadrists including COR Member Baha al-Araji, of a political accommodation in which senior Sadrists publicly called for those resisting the GOI to lay down their arms in return for an end to hostilities. Rubaie questioned Baha's authority within the Sadrist leadership, indicating that in his opinion only Sayyed Mustafa consistently could speak for MAS. He went on to mention that he had spoken to Sayyed Mustafa, located with MAS in Qom, three times recently, but that the Sadrist had not offered him any answers regarding MAS's intentions. Rubaie related that he had proposed that mainstream JAM and the ISF cooperate against the Special Groups, but Sayyed Mustafa told him to take this up with the OMS leadership in Najaf. Nobody there could offer Rubaie real answers.

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SHORING UP DOMESTIC POLITICAL SUPPORT  
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¶12. (S) Rubaie complained that the PM was receiving little

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political support during this time of crisis. Tawafuq would provide none and neither would the Kurds. Even the ministers who were with the PM in Basrah had been invisible in the press. The Ambassador countered that the Presidency Council had issued a good statement supporting the government against the criminals earlier that day which should be prominently featured in the media. The Council represented Sunni, Kurdish, and Shia approval for the PM's actions. President Talabani and KRG President Barzani were to meet the same day to provide unified Kurdish support for the government.

¶13. (S) The Ambassador passed on President Talabani's comments that Sayyed Mustafa was telling him now was the time to engineer a no-confidence vote in PM Maliki (an effort which the Ambassador understood Baha al-Araji was undertaking). Rubaie reported that former PM Jaafari was seeking the 50 signatures necessary for an emergency session of the COR, and a no-confidence vote was possible. The Ambassador opined that he could not imagine a time in which a no-confidence vote would be less attractive than right now. It was possible that Tawafuq could be short-sighted enough to support such a move, admitted the Ambassador. In any case, the PM needed to work with Speaker Mashadani and Deputy Speaker al-Attiya, as well as all of the bloc leaders, to make any vote one of resounding confidence in the government.

ISCI was strongly behind Maliki, VP Hashemi had called the PM, and the IIP had issued a statement of support.

¶14. (S) If some tried to engineer a vote of no-confidence, the Ambassador emphasized that the government must ensure that it fails utterly. The government should fight to ensure

that the fifty votes needed to bring a no-confidence motion do not materialize. Beyond that, they should seek a COR resolution in support of the Prime Minister's efforts to assert the state's authority against criminal elements. Rubaie agreed to discuss these matters with the PM urgently before approaching COR leaders, remarking that if they did not ensure the outcome, the effort might backfire. The Ambassador assured Rubaie of the USG's full support, as we had already demonstrated with our work to rally support behind him.

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SUPPORT OF REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS  
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¶15. (S) The Ambassador offered that the U.S. could approach key neighboring governments seeking statements of support for the GOI. Rubaie agreed this would be helpful and undertook to speak with Saudi FM Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Jordanian intelligence chief Mohammed Dahabi, and Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Sulayman. He also vowed to call on VP Abd al-Mahdi to use the Arab League Summit to publicly call on Arabs to support GOI efforts to assert state authority against criminals seeking to undermine it.

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REQUEST FOR INSTRUCTIONS  
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¶16. (S) Post requests the Department to instruct posts in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia to approach their respective host governments at the highest appropriate level in order to seek public statements of support for the efforts of the GOI and PM Maliki in asserting the authority of the lawful government of Iraq against criminal elements violently seeking to undermine the authority of the state. The instruction should also request these governments to urge all Iraqi parties and leaders with whom they might privately engage to show the same support.

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SYRIA STILL A PROBLEM  
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¶17. (S) Rubaie noted that he had tried to convince VP Abd al-Mahdi not to go to Damascus in order to demonstrate Iraqi displeasure with Syrian tolerance of the foreign terrorist flow into Iraq. While his efforts failed, he would tell Abd al-Mahdi to raise the Abu Ghadiyah network with the Syrians. The Ambassador agreed that this was the best that could be done in the circumstances, but repeated his earlier conclusion that Iraq would not see progress in this relationship if they continued to play the Syrians' game:

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Syria sent suicide bombers to Iraq while getting visits from high level Iraqi officials in return.

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IRANIAN INFLUENCE  
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¶18. (S) Rubaie related that the PM had spoken with someone in the Iranian leadership, though apparently not President Ahmadinejad, regarding the current security crisis. The Ambassador made it clear that Iran's current course was extraordinarily dangerous. The Iranians needed to understand that they had to unequivocally support the PM, who is now in a fight for his political life. There is a risk of a Shia civil war which would be hugely destructive for Iraq and for the broader Shia community. Those who say the Shia cannot govern would have the ammunition they were looking for, a prospect which could not possibly be in Iran's interests. The PM is fully committed to defeating criminal elements in Basrah and Iran knows very well what to do to support him. It needs to stop all of its actions which have led to the

current situation, including the weapons, funding, and training it has provided to criminal groups. Iran must make the decision: does it want to see Maliki fail or succeed? Rubaie agreed with the Ambassador's observation that Iranian leaders were so obsessed with gaining tactical advantages from the situation that they failed to see the strategic issue confronting them.

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SOFA TALKS  
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¶19. (S) The Ambassador noted that SOFA talks were proceeding well and that the U.S. supported the Iraqi delegation's proposal to hold the next round of negotiations in Washington. Iraqi delegation lead Mohammed Haj Hamoud had told his U.S. counterpart that he was only allowed to negotiate on the SOFA from the coming Saturday through Monday and that these talks would need to be followed by talks on the SFA the rest of the week. This was not in accordance with the latest understanding between the respective governments in which the SOFA would be negotiated by the SOFA delegation, which would not have any responsibility for the SFA. Rubaie agreed that this was the understanding and undertook to relay this to Hamoud.  
CROCKER